

**Report of External Review Team
Anthropology Program – Western Carolina University
March 2007**

A) INTRODUCTION

The external review team for the Western Carolina University Anthropology Program visited the campus on February 11-12, 2007. During this period, the review team (Dr. Janet Levy of UNC Charlotte, Prof. Donna Boyd of Radford University, and Dr. Cynthia Atterholt of WCU) met with almost all of the full-time faculty in Anthropology, met with several students, visited the facilities, and took the opportunity to speak with the departmental secretary (we were unable to meet with Jane Brown, the full-time, non-tenure-track faculty member who had been called away on a family emergency). We also met with the interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the associate provost. The review team focused on the undergraduate program in anthropology and was enormously impressed with the dedication and skill of the faculty and the growth in the program. Although our charge was to focus on the undergraduate program, we also briefly address the proposed M.S. in Forensic Anthropology because, when approved, it will have an important impact on the undergraduate program.

Prior to our visit, each team member had read the internal self-study and the campus guidelines for external reviewers. While we were on campus, we had the opportunity to examine some of the promotional materials developed by the Anthropology Program and we were also given examples of syllabi for the core courses in the major, as well as vitas for the full-time faculty.

B) STRENGTHS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE ANTHROPOLOGY PROGRAM

The commitment of the Anthropology faculty is outstanding. Despite a heavy teaching load, each faculty member we talked with expressed enthusiasm for teaching and demonstrated a real hands-on commitment to interacting with students and providing a learning-centered atmosphere in anthropology courses. We were concerned that there might be tensions among the faculty because of the growth of the B.S. in Forensic Anthropology in comparison to the B.A. in general anthropology, but we found none of that. The faculty are very collegial and collaborative. They all demonstrated a commitment to students with diverse interests in anthropology.

The syllabi of the core courses demonstrate appropriate coverage of relevant material, as well as high expectations for student participation in learning. Each class requires writing, oral participation, and research beyond the standard textbook. While the relatively small size of all classes may raise some problems in the future (see below), it is clear that the faculty take advantage of small classes to challenge students to participate in active learning and critical thinking. A review of the cycle of courses offered since 2002 demonstrates a good diversity of offerings, despite the small size of the faculty. So, students have the opportunity to benefit from anthropology's distinctive cross-cultural perspective through courses about Africa, Latin America, and indigenous people of North America.

It is also clear that faculty involve students in research, including in the Ethnographic Laboratory supervised by Dr. Coyle, the Archaeology Laboratory supervised by Dr. Eastman, and the Forensics Laboratory supervised by Prof and Chair, Dr. Williams. This kind of hands-on research experience is important both for student success and student retention, and the WCU anthropology program does this well. With two exceptions discussed later in this document, the facilities for anthropology at WCU are generally good. Storage for archaeological collections, something often lacking, is excellent. Faculty are clustered together and are accessible to students, and students have social space available as well. Faculty offices and research space are convenient to each other.

The structure of the curriculum for the B.A. and the B.S. is minimally prescriptive (only three required courses). Although many anthropology programs are more prescriptive, in general this plan seems to work for students at WCU. Because there are relatively few faculty, it turns out that students must take courses from all of them in order to fulfill the necessary hours for the major. Thus, even though there is no requirement to take diverse courses, in fact students do: they gain the distinctive holistic perspective of anthropology, integrating biological anthropology, archaeology, and cultural anthropology. We make some additional comments on this point below in C-2.

The most distinctive aspect of anthropology at WCU is the B.S. in Forensic Anthropology. The program is indeed fortunate to have the excellent equipment and reasonable facilities for this program (but see discussion of some needed resources below). Although there is a risk that students interested in forensic anthropology would only take a narrow range of courses, we were happy to see that this does not happen. We know that public interest in forensic anthropology is, in part, a result of television and other media; this raises the question of sustainability, as fashions in popular culture change. However, at the undergraduate level, we think a forensic anthropology program can maintain itself for the long term. Even if students do not go on to work in the forensic anthropology area, the program provides them with important skills in research, writing, and critical thinking: these skills will not go out of fashion.

Our positive impression of the faculty and the program was strengthened through our interactions with students. We met with five students who have either recently graduated or are close to graduation. Their positive enthusiasm was striking. They unanimously praised the accessibility of the faculty, the faculty's commitment to supporting students, the high quality of the program, and the potential for participating beyond the classroom. They told us about an active Anthropology Club that organizes trips and other experiences (surprisingly, the club was not mentioned in the department's self-study). They also capably expressed the cohesiveness of the anthropology majors, who study and socialize together in a lounge in the McKee Building. In terms of those faculty practices that encourage student retention, we find that that the anthropology faculty is exemplary. They practice an open-door policy, encourage student sociability, and provide numerous opportunities for students and faculty to work together collaboratively on research projects.

In summary, the great strength of Anthropology at WCU is a knowledgeable, dedicated faculty who provide a diverse curriculum and many opportunities for active learning.

C) CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

It was clear from our visit to WCU's Anthropology and Sociology Department that the Anthropology program and faculty are currently facing a time of unprecedented change, fueled, in part, by the identification of WCU as a "Focus Growth" institution. While this is a time of exciting opportunity, it does not come without its own set of unique challenges. We have identified at least five concerns for the Anthropology program, relating to the impact of growth on 1) Faculty professional development; 2) Student professional development; 3) Curriculum issues; 4) Role and position of Cherokee Studies within (and outside) the program; and 5) Adequacy of supporting facilities (e.g., budgetary and space).

1. Faculty Professional Development

As Department Chair, John Williams expressed concern in the 2006 WCU Anthropology Program Review document (p. 14-15) that heavy faculty teaching loads make conducting state-of-the-art research difficult, particularly for new, tenure-track faculty. This theme resounded at our meeting with the anthropology faculty. While this problem is not unique to WCU and is not easily solved, it will likely be exacerbated by the continued growth in the program, particularly with the implementation of the Master's degree in forensic anthropology. The current teaching load will not be sustainable with addition of the research and advising requirements of a graduate program. The increased focus on the graduate degree in forensic anthropology will likely necessitate additional staffing and/or reassignment of current positions and duties. [For example, some faculty identified the need for a full-time Forensic Anthropology Laboratory Director or Manager.]

It is recommended that Anthropology faculty, working with their administration, identify ways to meet these added demands which accompany growth without sacrificing exemplary teaching, research, and service productivity in their program. This should include discussions about equitable allocation of resources and teaching loads throughout the program. [Faculty members expressed a desire to see more support for the Archaeology and Ethnography Research Laboratories, for example, and to transform the Linguistic Anthropology position into a permanent, full-time one.] It will also likely include discussions about optimal class sizes for Anthropology courses, particularly those that serve the Liberal Studies program. We recommend serious consideration of teaching fewer, but larger, sections of the introductory courses in order to free up faculty time for upper-level courses and, ultimately, a graduate program and increased research. Finally, opportunities for Faculty Research Sabbaticals need to be made available and encouraged and the infrastructure supporting such venues developed. In sum, the impact of the expansion of the Anthropology program (particularly in relation to forensics and the development of a Master's program) on faculty workloads, research productivity, and leadership needs to be addressed.

2. Student Professional Development

The WCU Anthropology and Sociology Department has chosen Goal 4 (Student Professional Development) as its focus for Assessment efforts for the 2006-2007 academic year. While a recent alumni survey sent to Anthropology majors elicited quite positive feedback

regarding the nature of the program (this was echoed by our face-to-face meetings with students during our visit), this survey reflected only a small (n=13) number of anthropology majors' opinions about the program. Williams correctly states (p. 15 of 2006 Program Review document) that the alumni survey "...points to the need for better communication with alumni. Open lines of communication with alumni would allow the program to better judge its effectiveness in preparing majors for real world occupations." There is, then, an important need for added focus on student professional development and progress. These could include the following:

- the development of more formal assessment tools for evaluating student professional development and progress through alumni surveys and interviews but also through assessment of *students still engaged in the program*. These assessment tools (whether they be formal surveys, questionnaires, exams, and/or senior research projects) can easily be incorporated into a required senior-level Capstone course and allow more objective, quantitative and qualitative data to be collected about student learning and progress (although a senior capstone course is, of course, not the only way to do this);
- a greater focus on student post-graduate job preparation and career placement. WCU Anthropology students expressed their desire for this in our meeting with them, which is not surprising given the current high degree of competitiveness of many post-graduate job markets. This was also identified as a deficiency in the Alumni Survey. Again, a senior Capstone course can easily devote a portion of the course to resume building and job interviewing skills as well as an exploration of available career opportunities;
- enhanced opportunities for student voice. It was suggested during our visit that one avenue toward student retention is the development of greater opportunities for student input into how a department is run. While Anthropology students asserted that the Anthropology club was active in many arenas, it was not clear to us how influential this club has been in expressing student opinions about the major. This may need to be clarified. Again, a senior Capstone course can easily provide students with such an additional voice about their experiences in the major and the department. An additional recommendation is that the department pursue the development of a WCU chapter of Lambda Alpha, the National Honor Society in Anthropology (<http://www.lambdaalpha.com/>). This will give students not only a welcomed boost to their resume, but provide opportunities for financial support of their research (in the way of scholarships), a venue for student publication (in the Lambda Alpha Journal), and an additional opportunity for student cohesion and voice in their department.

3. Curriculum Issues

Two aspects of the Anthropology curriculum are identified as deserving of additional attention and discussion by WCU anthropology faculty and administration. First, the introductory-level liberal studies and major courses (ANTH 110, 120, 250, and 260) are described in the 2006 Program Review document (p. 16) as duplicative in effort and content, "covering much the same material." At the same time, the number of Liberal Studies upper division Perspective courses in Anthropology was wanting. In a time of growth and difficult decisions regarding teaching loads and course offerings, it seems logical that this could be a starting discussion point for re-evaluation of the course curriculum. Are these separate courses

necessary? What are the advantages and disadvantages to the department of combining or condensing some of these courses?

A second concern expressed during our WCU visit and review revolves around the flexibility of the Anthropology major requirements. Aside from three courses and a major or minor concentration, there is surprisingly very little required structure for the major. While we agree with Williams (2006 Program Review document, p. 16) that an advantage to this system is that it purposefully leaves the program “uncomplicated” and allows students to explore a variety of anthropological as well as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies, a potential downfall is the possibility of a lack of academic rigor in the major. This is particularly true in Forensic Anthropology where there is keen interest in the field and competition for a relatively few number of jobs. So-called “hard” science backgrounds (e.g., in Biology and Chemistry) are seen as increasingly indispensable when seeking a forensic-related post-graduate position. In addition, a knowledge of Statistics is essential in forensics. While WCU forensic students are encouraged to take these courses as part of their second major or minor concentration (and many do), they are not required to do so. It was suggested during our visit that the presence of one or more required courses for Anthropology majors (beyond the three now in place) would potentially increase the “marketability” of these students. In a similar vein, the sustainability of student interest in Forensic Anthropology needs to be evaluated and balanced in light of the ability to prepare such students to secure jobs in their chosen field.

A related curriculum question is the impact of the Interdisciplinary Forensic Science degree program on the Anthropology curriculum. What will be the effect of such a program on Anthropology course offerings, enrollment, staffing, and major and minor requirements? As discussed above, in section C-1, addition of the M.S. in Forensic Anthropology will impact staffing of the undergraduate program. Participation in the Interdisciplinary Forensic Science program will only add to these problems.

The above curriculum issues are obviously not amenable to easy resolutions and require extended discussions among Anthropology faculty (and, indeed, in the 2006 Program Review document summary, Williams expresses his intention for his department to engage in such discussions). Day-long or Weekend-long faculty retreats (preferably off-campus) can be helpful in allowing extended time for beginning such discussions and encouraging faculty to engage in both short-term and long-term curriculum planning in the face of significant change. They are also an important camaraderie-building tool to enhance the collegiality within the department.

4. The Challenge of What to Do With Cherokee Studies

One of the most important challenges facing Anthropology at WCU is the Cherokee Studies program. Administration and faculty need to put energy into clarifying (1) the mission and goals of the program, (2) the governance and budgeting of the program, and (3) the relationship of the program to Anthropology (and, possibly, to other units on campus).

The problem, as we see it, is that several academic and non-academic initiatives related to the Cherokee Nation and to Cherokee Studies exist on campus, but they are not coordinated, nor administered in an effective and transparent way. These units or programs minimally include:

the undergraduate minor in Cherokee Studies housed in Anthropology; the M.A. in Cherokee Studies affiliated with the Department of History; the Cherokee Center, an independent outreach unit; and the Sequoyah Distinguished Professorship in Cherokee Studies that seems to have been housed in several units on campus. The organization, budgeting, and administration of interdisciplinary programs is a challenge on many campuses, but the case of Cherokee Studies seems more complicated than most. This is perhaps because the university's involvement with the Cherokee includes both academic and non-academic programs.

The Anthropology faculty hold diverse views about the future of Cherokee Studies. A good case can be made that there is a natural fit between Cherokee Studies and Anthropology. Cherokee Studies, or some version of it, could become a track within the undergraduate anthropology program. In this case, the administrative relationship between the staff of Cherokee Studies (including the Sequoyah professor) and the Anthropology program needs to be clarified, the annual evaluation of Cherokee Studies faculty integrated into Anthropology, and the Anthropology budget adjusted appropriately. However, some anthropology faculty are less enthusiastic about the presence of Cherokee Studies in the department. Some of the staff of Cherokee Studies are not academically focused, and do not fit well in an academic unit. It could be that the staff of Cherokee Studies should be split, with the academic staff being integrated into Anthropology, while the outreach personnel join the Cherokee Center. There still could be – and should be – ongoing collaboration between Cherokee Studies and Cherokee Center, providing research opportunities for faculty and for students. The relationship of the undergraduate minor in Cherokee Studies and the Cherokee Studies track in the History M.A. also deserves attention, especially given that the graduate track relies in part on anthropology courses.

The external review committee does not propose a specific solution to the Cherokee Studies issue. However, we strenuously recommend that all the relevant parties, including the provost and/or chancellor as needed, explicitly tackle this problem. Currently, there is confusion in the lines of reporting and responsibility, in the budgetary arrangements, and in mission and goals of all of the different units related to Cherokee Studies on the WCU campus. As other parts of anthropology grow, Cherokee Studies could be a burden, rather than an advantage, if attention is not paid to administrative and budgetary structures. There are some hard decisions to be made about Cherokee Studies at WCU, and we urge the faculty and administration to tackle them sooner rather than later.

5. Adequacy of Supporting Facilities

In general, Anthropology benefits from a good physical plant. Offices, teaching spaces, and laboratories are clustered in the McKee Building. There appears to be space for students to socialize, which is one factor in improving retention. A large special budgetary allocation has allowed the department to equip its forensic anthropology laboratory with excellent equipment. However, there is one budgetary issue and two space issues that the review committee would like to bring forward.

First, while there has been more than adequate funding of capital equipment, there appears to be limited funding for on-going expenses of expendable supplies and for maintenance. There should be a dedicated, continuing budget line for these items. Second, we believe that

part-time faculty should have a dedicated office, rather than being forced to perch in the main departmental office. Part-time faculty provide important teaching contributions and they deserve to have an actual office, with desk(s), file cabinet, bookshelves, telephone, etc. This improves the faculty situation and serves students who need advising, to ask questions about courses, etc. This office can certainly be shared, with specific drawers and sections of shelving dedicated to individuals. On the UNC Charlotte campus, part-time faculty use a shared phone that is set up with individual voice mail boxes for each of them.

Finally, faculty expressed frustration with the need to crowd several courses into the forensic laboratory or the archaeology laboratory. If classes are scheduled in those spaces, they interfere with research activities. This is already a problem and will become particularly critical if and when a master's degree program is implemented. A solution has been suggested by the faculty: room 110 in the McKee Building could be dedicated to teaching by the anthropology program. This room is convenient to faculty and students. The space will hold both introductory and liberal studies courses (at least at current enrollment levels) and upper-level anthropology courses. It has reasonably secure storage facilities for all the stuff that anthropologists use in their teaching (e.g., skeletal remains, archaeological artifacts, ethnographic artifacts), and additional storage can be added easily. If this room were dedicated to undergraduate teaching in anthropology (i.e., anthropology courses would have first choice of scheduling this room), the labs on the ground floor would be freed for faculty and student research and would also be appropriate for materials that must be stored in a firmly secure setting (e.g., forensic case material).

D) SUMMARY

WCU is fortunate to have such an exemplary program as the Anthropology one. The Anthropology faculty at WCU are what make this program special—they have a reputation for being excellent teachers who are dedicated to their students, engaged in faculty and faculty-student collaborative research, and actively involved in university and community service. These faculty are the department's main strength and the devotion that their students express toward them well reflects this. Support of such faculty, therefore, is critical toward the department's continued success.

Given that their program is facing significant growth, it is not surprising that there are concerns about the future. These revolve around clarification of faculty responsibilities and support; evaluation of student learning, progress, and career development; curriculum development and change; clarification of the status of Cherokee Studies within the program; and adequacy of facilities (including financial and space support) to support such an expansion. Our recommendations are that Anthropology faculty and WCU administration engage in open and extended discussions among and between themselves addressing each of the above concerns in order to most effectively adapt to and enjoy continued success in the face of unprecedented growth and change.

Thank you for the opportunity to review such an outstanding program. Our recommendations are summarized in the following section.

E) APPENDIX – Summary of Major Recommendations

- Adjust teaching loads to allow increased research productivity (and to prepare for the masters program)
 - Consider fewer but larger sections of introductory courses
 - Consider merging the anthropology core courses and the Liberal Studies courses taught by anthropologists, to avoid duplication
- Consider establishing a capstone course for the undergraduate major to provide opportunities for career counseling, student research, and gathering of assessment data.
- Formalize adjunct requirements for at least the B.S. majors (e.g., statistics, chemistry, etc.), in the form of required “related work” or some other format.
- Allocate dedicated teaching space in order to free up laboratory space for research and curation.
- Provide part-time faculty with an office (shared is acceptable), not cramped space in the departmental office.
- Allocate appropriate funds for supplies and maintenance of labs.
- Fully evaluate and restructure all programs associated with Cherokee Studies.

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